

Diapers to Diplomas: A Marriage of Career Readiness and Early Childhood Development

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Studies show that positive childhood development, along with the right support system, generally will produce well-balanced, responsible and caring adults. The goal of the Henderson County schools is to achieve both by providing a continuum of services and opportunities that nurture and develop preschoolers and prepare high school seniors for their futures.

Career Technical Education

One of the opportunities Henderson County offers is a Family Consumer Sciences career track, which gives students a broad education in childhood development, as well as practical experience that will contribute to their futures. This is one of 14 career pathways offered by the system.

Students who wish to participate in the cooperative experience during their senior year must complete a series of prerequisite courses. The first pertains to child/human development. The course addresses the practical problems related to understanding the types and stages of human growth and development, the effects of heredity and environment and the needs of exceptional children. It also promotes optimum growth and development in the infancy, toddler and preschool stages. Next, the students have the option to participate in Child Development Services I and Child Development Services 2. These are designed for students who wish to further their education at the post-secondary level in the area of early childhood education or elementary education.

Through the Family Consumer Sciences coursework, students can earn a Career Major Certificate in addition to their high school diploma. This Career Major Certificate will help build a strong portfolio a student can use when pursuing additional education or employment. This major increases student achievement and contributes to the number who complete post-secondary education. The major also fosters motivation by helping students make the connection between what they are learning in school and success in future educational and employment opportunities. Another benefit for students is realizing the relevance of education in their lives, which helps them build futures that match their aspirations.

New Early Learning Center

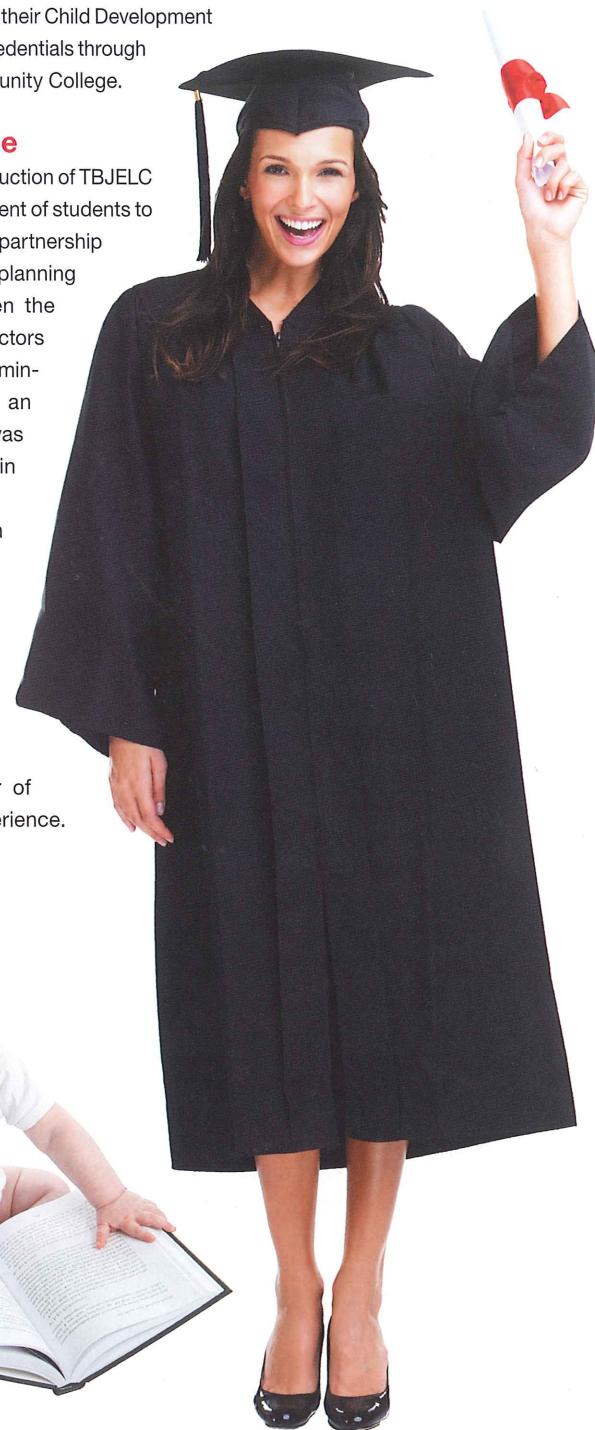
The new Thelma B. Johnson Early Learning Center (TBJELC), which is dedicated to earliest learners, offers another great opportunity to students. On this campus are 20 preschool classrooms and one high school classroom. As you walk the halls of TBJELC you see bright eyes of children actively engaged and learning. These eyes belong to 4- to 17-year-old youths who are benefitting from interaction with each other. Here high school students participating in the Family Consumer Science Program receive extensive on-the-job training for preschool and general child care. The youngsters in turn are able to interact with responsible,

nurturing young adults. For their work, the students may obtain dual credits and/or their Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials through Henderson Community College.

Our Marriage

With the construction of TBJELC and the reassignment of students to the school, a new partnership evolved. Multiple planning meetings between the high school instructors and preschool administration led to an agreement that was "a match made in heaven."

In the past, high school students were assigned to each of our eight elementary schools and/or local child care centers during their senior year of cooperative experience.



This consisted of the students arriving, being assigned to the classroom and sitting in the back cutting out laminated materials. The students became more volunteers in the room than active instructional participants. They met the requirements of paperwork and lesson plan implementation, but their experience was not rich and rigorous. Senioritis and accountability met head-to-head.

Now the high school students first participate in nine weeks of training provided by experts. This has on occasion led to some disgruntled students and parents. We use an analogy and explain that if you were assigned to co-op at the local bank, the CEO would not let you start in the teller window the first day reporting to work. Their business is money; our business is children. The training topics include specific instructional practices implemented in our program. We want the students to have an overview of what is actually occurring in the rooms. We want to get them involved in the room and not to simply observe once they begin.

After the first nine weeks, the students are assigned to a classroom and work with the classes Monday through Thursday. Fridays are dedicated to planning and reviews with the high school instructor. The students participate in small group activities, which they help design, as well as motor development, literacy and math-building activities, intervention groups with students not yet enrolled and family events. The students give their time to attend after-school activities and parent/teacher conferences. Our preschool teachers turn in student evaluations every two weeks. These are reviewed and the high school students write reflections about how to improve their skills.

In addition to the classroom experience, students who are interested in specific professions can benefit from hands-on learning. The preschool is able to offer shadowing opportunities to students interested in occupational, physical and speech therapy, school psychology and social work. The students are able to see firsthand the high expectations and requirements needed to establish a quality early childhood program. The impact of the importance of early childhood education and the breadth of what that means is impressed upon these students. This knowledge base, under close supervision, provides a solid foundation when pursuing their postsecondary goals.

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Students of all ages benefit from the increased interaction provided by Henderson County's Early Learning Center.

Henderson County Preschool

The Henderson County school system also has a strong preschool program that puts youngsters on the right path at an early age. The curriculum is designed to meet all the Kentucky Early Childhood standards, enhance skills in all developmental areas (social, emotional, cognitive, self-help, language and motor) and help children become school ready. The program consists of 24 sessions that provide service to 422 students. The classroom capacity does not exceed 20 students. The program is housed in one location and offers child care on site from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. The lead teachers are Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education (IECE) certified and each classroom has two program assistants.

A strong thread weaves through these many different learning and development options for youngsters and high school seniors who reap reciprocal benefits from interacting with each other. Through these opportunities, Henderson County Schools promises to grow youngsters and adolescents into responsible, successful adults.